DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 985 RC 022 828

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TITLE	Education Is a Total Way of Life: Models and the Reality.
PUB DATE	2000-03-00
NOTE	16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society (San Antonio, TX, March 8-12, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	American Indian Culture; *American Indian Education; Boarding Schools; *Canada Natives; *Culturally Relevant Education; Educational History; *Educational Practices; Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; Holistic Approach; *Nonformal Education; *Role of Education; Tribally Controlled Education
IDENTIFIERS	British Columbia

ABSTRACT

A qualitative field study employing participant observation revealed that the Nisga'a, a Native people of northwest British Columbia, Canada, believe that education is a total way of life, with teaching and learning being a lifelong process. Traditionally, education was conducted by one's parents; extended family, especially maternal aunts and uncles; and members of one's clan. Education was not separated into schools, but happened in every societal setting through practical training and participation in tribal activities. With European contact, formal schooling was introduced, and progressed from missionary schools on Nisga'a land to missionary boarding schools and government-operated provincial boarding schools. The boarding schools devastated Nisga'a culture by removing children from their families and their tribal form of education, forbidding use of their native language, and exposing them to discrimination from non-Natives. Eventually the Nisga'a joined the British Columbia school system and established their own school district in their traditional territory. This kept the children home and exposed them to the traditional holistic style of education, but there is still the dichotomy of formal school and the other types of learning. The Nisga'a have provided Nisga'a language and culture courses, but other courses are provincially prescribed and not relevant to Nisga'a experience. The Nisga'a would like to see their language and culture incorporated throughout the curriculum. (Contains 36 references.) (TD)

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ED 450 985

Education Is a Total Way of Life: Models and the Reality

Paper Presented at the CIES Conference in San Antonio, Texas, USA
March 8 - 12, 2000

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The role and nature of education have been theorized in various ways. In the human capital theory, education is regarded as an investment in human capital, which will bring both individual and social returns (Carnoy, 1995; Schultz, 1961). Economic reproduction theorists argue that education is utilized by the dominant class as a means to perpetuate the existing unequal social stratum (Apple, 1990, 1993; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991), while the cultural reproduction theory states that schools contribute to the reproduction of different cultural capitals among different social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Aronowitz & Giroux (1985) explain that the resistance theory criticizes reproduction theory as too pessimistic, and focuses on various potentials of resistance to the existing social inequalities. Freire (1982, 1985) emphasizes the importance of conscientization of learners so that learners understand the inequality in society. Phenomenological theorists take a more humanistic and micro approach to see education, and focus on the individual learners' lived experience in life-worlds (Pinar & Raynolds, 1992; van Manen, 1990; 1991). Each theory can be used to clarify certain educational phenomena, but also has weak points and meets criticisms.

One thing that is common in the above mentioned theories is that they heavily focus on school or institutionalized education. With the exception of phenomenological theorists to some extent, others do not consider education as a system of teaching and learning in a broader and holistic sense. However, there are societies that regard school education simply as a part of whole teaching and learning processes that take place in the life of the individual. For Example, the Nisga'a, an indigenous group residing in the northwestern British Columbia, Canada, believe that education is a "total way of life", and see teaching and learning for human development in a holistic way. From this point of view, school education for the Nisga'a is just a part of the lifelong learning process. On the other hand, in the reality, it is also true that school education in the Nisga'a Nation has not smoothly fit into the holistic learning process.

1.2 Objectives

This paper attempts to do two things. First, to depict a folk model and an explanatory model to understand what the Nisga'a mean when they say that education is a "total way of life". Second, to describe what school education is to the Nisga'a. In order to make these attempts possible, this paper establishes the following objectives:

- to briefly depict the society of the Nisga'a Nation;
- to explain what folk model and explanatory model are;
- to depict the elements of human development shown by Bronfenbrenner;
- to depict the Nisga'a folk model and explanatory model; and
- to describe the school education in the Nisga'a Nation.

1.3 Methodology

The empirical data in this paper was collected during a field study conducted in the Nass Valley (see the next section) in June-July and October-December in 1995. The current author employed participant observation as the research methodology. Formal interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The interviewee was asked if he or she was willing to be identified either through a consent letter or orally. Most of the interviewees were willing to be identified.

The current author had opportunities to attend various traditional ceremonies such as a totem pole raising, funeral feasts, stone moving feasts, a wedding feast, and to follow a fisherman to a fishing ground. She also visited three elementary schools in three different villages, and a secondary school and a kindergarten in New Aiyansh (see below), and was

allowed to sit in classrooms to observe them.

2. THE PROFILE OF THE NISGA'A NATION

2.1 The Traditional Site

The Nisga'a are First Nations[1] people who have resided in the Nass River Valley (Nass Valley) of northwestern British Columbia, Canada, as many Nisga'a state, "since time immemorial." The population of the Nisga'a in 1993 was about 6,000. 2,500 people out of 6,000 live in the four Nisga'a villages in their traditional territory: Gingolx (Kincolith), Lakalzap (Greenville), Gitwinksihlkw (Canyon City), and Gitlakdamiks (New Aiyansh). Another 3,500 people live elsewhere in Canada and around the world (Nisga'a Tribal Council, 1993). Among these four, Gitwinksihlkw uses this traditional name as an official village name.

Kincolith and Aiyansh (Old Aiyansh) were established by missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Originally, Gitlakdamiks and Aiyansh were two different villages on the north bank of the Nass River. When Robert Tomlinson, an Anglican missionary, arrived in the area, he started Aiyansh less than three kilometers from Gitlakdamiks "[r]ather than attempt to win over Gitlakdamiks" which, in his eyes, had "'undesirable' influences of the native culture" (Patterson II, 1982, 116). When Aiyansh was flooded in 1960, the village was moved across the river to what is called New Aiyansh today (Nisga'a Tribal Council, 1993).

New Aiyansh is located 112 kilometers northwest of Terrace, British Columbia. This village is the biggest of the four villages. The location of Gitwinksihlkw is 16 kilometers west of New Aiyansh. Until October 1995, this village was accessible only by a suspension bridge over the Nass River. Now there is a commercial bridge that can be crossed by car. Greenville, the second largest village, is located 48 kilometers southwest of New Aiyansh. Kincolith is 40 kilometers west of Greenville and located at the mouth of the Nass River. Each village has a band council, and the Nisga'a Tribal Council, located in New Aiyansh, consists of "all of the executives of the four band councils and the ranking chieftains of the four clans" (McKay & McKay, 1987, 66).

2.2 The Kin System

The Nisga'a live in a matrilineal society that has four main *pdeeks* (clans in English translation): Gisk'ahaast (Killer Whale), Laxgibuu (Wolf), Ganada (Raven) and Laxsgiik (Eagle). Each *pdeek* has several "*Wilps*", which are translated as "Houses" in English, under the *pdeek*. Traditionally, when a baby is born, the baby is a member of a *Wilp*, a *pdeek*, and the Nisga'a Nation as well as a nuclear family (Nisga'a Language and Culture Centre, 1995).

A *pdeek* originally consisted of a group of people who had a collective name, and shared the same history up to the point when the people set up separate *Wilps*. *Wilps* are ranked within *clans*, and the headman of the highest *Wilp* in a *clan* is chief. A Nisga'a traditional name, *Wilp*, *pdeek*, and the status of the chief are passed on to the next generation through the matrilineage (McNeary, 1976, p. 14; Allison Nyce[2]). Dennis Nyce, a totem pole carver from Gitwinksihlkw, stated:

> Although our people may come and go ... they die, but the name never dies. We have stories about the time that our people, the Nisga'a people, lived in

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[1] To refer to the indigenous population in Canada, there are several different terms such as "Indian", "indigenous people", "aboriginal people", "Native people", and "First Nations people". All of them are used by the people themselves, although some terms are rejected by some people. This paper adopts the last term.

[2] Personal communication, June 6, 1995

> darkness before the coming of light. We have the stories, so these are how old these names are.[3]

2. KEY CONCEPTS

2.1 Folk Model and Explanatory Model

In a general sense, a model is something that represents or stands for the structure of something else. Jenkins (1981) mentions two competing meanings of model in sociology and social anthropology. To explain one of them, he quotes Pelto and Pelto who sated that a model is "any representation that provides a 'rough draft' around which to organize inquiry" (Jenkins, 1981, p. 94). Jenkins, however, stresses that the usage of such models is not limited to the scientific discourse. The other meaning of "model" is what Jenkins calls the *all-encompassing definition of models* that defines a model simply as a construct which is built by somebody and stands for something else. The second definition could recognize the epistemological equality between the investigator and the investigated. There is, however, a distinction between folk model and explanatory model. (Jenkins, 1981). Both folk model and explanatory model have synonyms given by different scholars.

When an investigator goes into a social field and observes social events and phenomena in the field, the investigator tries to find out rules, regulations, and structures behind the events and phenomena. These events and phenomena can be perceived only through interpretation. The investigator gets local people's statements that are "partial expressions of knowledge, situation-specific, and indexical" (Holy & Stuchlik, 1981, p. 23). The investigator then attempts to create meaningful systems to interpret and understand what he or she has seen and heard. The task of the investigator is:

> To replicate, by combining this information, as precisely as possible the missing parts, the general, nonsituational and taken for granted parts of the models which people construct to make sense of their world and their actions in it. Strictly speaking, it will always be a model of a model, since it can never be "a model in use". (Holy & Stuchlik, 1981, p. 23).

This is what is often called "explanatory model" or "scientific model."

However, it is not only the investigator who attempts to create meaningful systems, but also the local people who are participating in both the events and the related phenomena. Bohannan (1957) terms the system created by the investigator, often social anthropologists and sociologists, "analytical system", while he terms the system created by the participants "folk system" (4).

Helander (1987) states that folk models could be understood as something similar to metaphors in the way that what defines a phenomenon in one domain is used to define another phenomenon in another domain. Ovesen (1990) takes the notion of folk model "to be a structured, culturally standardized set of ideas about actions or states of affairs" (149). People have shared knowledge of how to behave and understand events (D'Andrade, 1984, 1990), which could be regarded as blueprints. Such blueprints are in people's mind even when they are not in action, and do not refer to a particular action, but to a type of action (Holy & Stuchlik, 1981). However, a culture is not simply a shared system of symbols, nor does it directly determine behavior. Cultural knowledge is not something that directly generates social behaviors, but shapes and constrains them. Keesing (1987) states that:

> An ideational theory of culture can look at cultural knowledge as distributed within a social system, can take into account the variation between

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[3] Interview, December 7, 1995

> individuals' knowledge of and vantage points on the cultural heritage of their people (371).

Although folk models are related to the behavior of people living in society, there are two different models: one is built to guide behavior, and the other one influences behavior indirectly. LeVine (1990), borrowing Geertz's terms, defines the former as models for reality, and the latter models of reality. "Models for" are normative statements about how things should be, and "models of" are statements about how things are. However, he states that folk cultures often combine the two, and do not respect the fact-value division.

D'Andrade (1987) uses terms cultural model and scientific model. He defines the former as "a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group" (p. 112), and the commonsense understanding which people use in their daily lives. People deal with their interpretations of the world based on the folk model as if they were self-evident truths. Since a folk model has the nature of intersubjectivity, related information does not have to be explicitly explained (D'Andrade, 1987).

Mentioning ethnoscience, Riesman (1990) states that what is sought in ethnoscience are how the people investigated think, classify phenomena, and perceive the world. Unfortunately, local people under study are sometimes regarded as ignorant about causes and consequences of their activities. Folk models have been regarded by some people as imaginary and misguided false knowledge, and inferior to scientific explanatory models (Jenkins, 1981; Holy & Stuchlik, 1981). Another issue of folk model is authorship. When a folk model is formulated, it is authored by the investigator, not by the local people themselves. Milton (1981) suggests that since a folk model is formulated to analyze other people's knowledge, not the investigator's own, the analyst's control over the model should be kept minimal.

2.2 Human Development

In his early book, Bronfenbrenner (1979) offers a new theoretical framework in human development. The primary focus of the new perspective is the transitions that are a joint function of the developing person and the environment. He claims, the focus on the evolving interaction between the two is an important concept. In other words, he asserts that human behavior evolves as environment alters. He divides the environment surrounding the developing person into four different levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

A microsystem is "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). A given setting can be a home, day center, playground, etc. Human development takes place through interaction between the developing person and the persons, objects, and symbols in the immediate environment. These forms of interaction are referred to as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The effect of increased levels of proximal processes foster effective psychological development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner defines a mesosystem as "the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (1979, p. 25). For a child, it may be the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group, and for an adult, among family, workplace, and social life.

An exosystem is one or more settings in which the developing person is not actively involved. However, events in this system affect or are affected by the setting involving the developing person. For a young child, examples of this system may include older sibling's school class, parent's place of work, parent's friends, and so forth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem is defined as "consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the understanding of human development has to take into account aspects of not only the immediate setting, but also of the environment beyond it. As far as there is an absence of this broadened perspective, the understanding is characterized as development-out-of-context. In his definition, human development is the process of acquisition of a more differentiated conception of environment, and involves a change in the characteristics of the developing person. However, this change is not ephemeral or situation-bounded, and occurs concurrently in both perception and action (Brondenbrenner, 1979).

In addition to the four systems, he also shows chronosystem that "extends the environment into a third dimension" (1994, p. 1646). He describes, "A chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives" (1994, p. 1646). He gives examples, such as the change in family structure, employment, socio-economic status over the life time. One of his criticisms of the conventional studies in child psychology and related fields is that they regard environment as a static structure which does not lead a person into the evolving processes of interaction.

3. MODELS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The Nisga'a Folk Model

Prior to European contact, "education was the aboriginal right of the Nisga'a parents, of the extended family (especially maternal uncles and aunts), and of the members of the individual's clan" (McKay & McKay, 1987, p. 66). The traditional Nisga'a way of teaching children was to enhance the qualities and talents of the children through practical training. Dennis Nyce stated:

> Our way of teaching is we take you as a carver, and we show you what to do. Your instructor will show you the proper way to hold a mask while you are carving it. He will show you a proper way to gouge the wood out. Your hands on experience is the best teaching method that we know.[4]

Girls were as valuable as boys in the Nisga'a tradition. There was special and practical training for girls by the grandmother and the mother to take care of the households and to be creative. One of the important roles of the grandmother was to pass on, orally, the traditions and the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* (the Nisga'a Law, a protocol of the Nisga'a life) so that children would not be lost or broken. The Nisga'a did not train all the children in the same way, because every person had a valuable contribution to make to the Nisga'a Nation through the person's different qualities, knowledge, and wisdom.[5]

According to the Nisga'a traditional philosophy of teaching and learning, a person is in progress throughout his or her life. They believe that learning is a life-long process, and that it starts at a person's birth and ends at the person's death. At the same time, according to Bert McKay, teaching is regarded as a gift.[6]

Importantly, there is no Nisga'a term for "failure" that has exactly the same meaning as the English term. In Nisga'a, the closest terms to "failure" are "Nidii Hliskwt (not complete)" and "Nidii Galksi'akhlkwt (did not go through). However, neither terms have the negative sense that the English term "failure" has.

Alvin McKay emphasized the important role that the whole Nisga'a Nation plays in their children's human development:

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[4] Interview, December 7, 1995

[5] Interview with Percy Tait, November 28, 1995

[6] Interview, November 2, 1995

> There are supportive groups that have responsibilities towards the education of young people who are outside the school. They are in the community, and one of these are the parents. Good parents will teach life values. [Children] learn everything about life, their lives, so that they can carry out the initial Nisga'a purpose of life, and that is to perpetuate life, and as they do that they strengthen their own family, strengthen the nation.[7]

Deanna Nyce emphasized the importance that she could, with the elders in the family and in the community, identify the gifts that her children were portraying.[8] Irene Griffin stated that it was important for a person to become "rounded." She mentioned that there were those who were regarded as well-educated, but who were not wise, and that it was because they were not rounded.[9] Kathleen Clayton stressed that people had to know their culture which would keep them strong. The Nisga'a society is strongly *pdeek* (clan)-oriented and community-oriented. When a person is to be married or a person is dead, it is the *pdeek* that holds the wedding or the funeral. She stated:

> Our culture is keeping us very strong, because we have everything to back us all up. You can die penniless and then still have a big funeral [in which] thousands of people are around."[10]

Figure 3.1 depicts the spheres of teaching and leaning in the Nisga'a Nation. This diagram is based on the formal and informal interviews, conversations with the Nisga'a people, and observations conducted by the current author. As it shows, school education for the Nisga'a is only a part of the hole process of learning which is lifelong. Teaching and learning can take place in every setting in the society, and learning as Nisga'a largely takes place at the sites where elders are. *Ayuukhl* Nisga'a is taught, *asaawak* (true stories) are told, people fish and hunt, and so on.

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[7] Interview, November 10, 1995

[8] Interview, November 2, 1995

[9] Interview, December 7, 1995

[10] Interview, November 28, 1995

Figure 3.1 Spheres in which teaching and learning take place in the Nisga'a Nation

3.2 The Explanatory Model

As described earlier, the explanatory model is created in the domain of scientific discourse. In this paper, the current author attempts to apply Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development to the author's observations. Figure 3.2 shows this application.

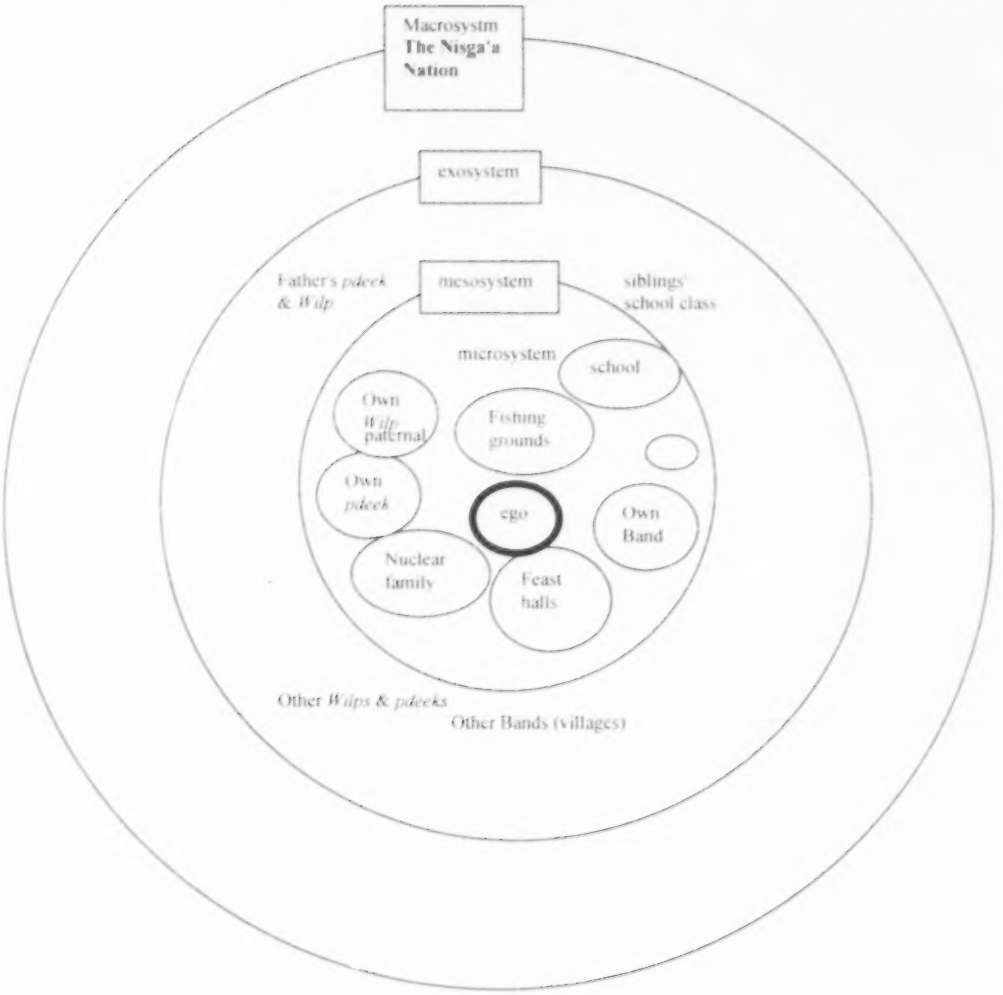

Figure 3.2 Application of the Theory of Human Development

In the Nisga'a Nation, among the settings in the microsystem shown in the figure, own *pdeek* (clan) and *Wilp* (House) play important roles. In the Nisga'a Nation, traditional ceremonies, such as wedding feasts, funeral feasts, stone moving feasts are held by the *pdeek*. It was often observed that parents and grandparents took their children and grandchildren to the feast halls, and explained important kin-systems and who chiefs and matriarchs were that the Nisga'a persons should know. Children also have their own important roles to play in the kin-system, and when a *pdeek* gives a feast, children are actively involved in the feast. Since the kin-system is so important, it is taught in kindergartens and elementary schools as well through different activities.

Mesosystem comprises the interrelations between two or more settings in which the evolving person is actively involved. In the Nisga'a Nation, interrelations between the band and the school, feast halls and the *pdeek*, fishing grounds and the *pdeek*, the nuclear family and the *Wilp* are important as well as other interrelations.

Exosystem is the setting in which the evolving person is not actively involved. It could be the father's *pdeek* and *Wilp*, siblings' school class, and so on. Although the evolving

person is not an active participant in this system, events in it affect and are affected by the person. As the person grows up, the social ecology changes, and so does the interaction between the two.

4. SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE NISGA'A NATION: THE PAST

4.1 Historical Changes

European school education was introduced to the Nass Valley with the arrival of Christian missionaries in the late 1860s. Education provided by the missionaries under the sponsorship of the Anglican Church Missionary Society was attractive to many Nisga'a, and the people were eager to learn English (McNeary, 1976). School was one of the advantages that the Nisga'a expected from the missionaries.

By the mid 1920s, some Nisga'a students began to be sent to residential schools outside the Nass Valley. The Church Missionary Society ran residential schools, while it maintained the missionary schools in the Nisga'a villages. The main curricula at the residential school were reading, writing, arithmetic, and sports. When the student reached age fourteen, half-day practical education was added. Although there were some certified teachers, the majority of the teachers were from the missionary field (McKay & McKay, 1987).

The missionary schools in the villages started to be transferred to the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) during the 1930s, and became so-called DIA Schools or Indian Day Schools. This transfer was completed by the early 1940s. However, as a result of the limited budgets of the federal government, the standard of education at DIA schools was not up to that of the province of British Columbia, and was roughly "ten to fifteen years behind the educational changes in British Columbia" (McKay & McKay, 1987, p. 68).

Since segregation based on race was being protested after the Second World War, a Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons appointed in 1946 proposed that young First Nations students be educated with non-First Nations children (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986). The federal government's goal changed from assimilation through separate education to immediate integration through multi-ethnic education in 1949. The Indian Act was amended in 1951, and many First Nations children were sent to provincial schools to be educated with non-First Nations students in order to be speedily integrated into the dominant society (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986).

Many Nisga'a students attending provincial schools were placed in private boarding homes. By the mid-1950s there was a sudden growth in the number of Nisga'a students attending high schools, and this caused a lack of available private boarding homes. As a result, many of the Nisga'a students were placed in commercial boarding homes where the conditions were particularly bad (McKay & McKay, 1987).

Thus school education of the Nisga'a drastically changed in less than one century. When schools were first introduced in the Nass Valley by the missionaries, the Nisga'a still had control of their children's education as well as some control of the missionaries (Patterson II, 1982, p. 124). However, once the federal government took over the schools in the valley, Nisga'a education started to be handled by non-Nisga'a agencies. This external control system lasted to 1975.

4.2 Colonization and Education

With the arrival of missionaries, Nisga'a traditional practices started to be regarded as pagan. The missionaries, "with Christian zeal, persuaded the Nisga'a to chop down the totem poles"

(Nisga'a Tribal Council, 1993, p. 10). In the 1880s, the potlatch[11] was intentionally suppressed, and the enactment of the *Potlatch Law* (contained in the Indian Act of 1884) reduced its practice. As the potlatch and ceremonial life generally declined, so did totem pole raising. The making of totem poles declined and many in the village were destroyed (Patterson II, 1982). Colonization of the Nass Valley started with the arrival of the missionaries.

The experience of residential schools of the Nisga'a people in different age categories are varied in terms of years of schooling and treatment that the people received in the schools. Many Nisga'a children were sent to various residential schools at a very young age after completion of the Indian Day Schools in the Nisga'a villages, as the Indian Day School did not include upper elementary classes. They stayed in residential schools until they were fifteen or sixteen years old.[12] They were allowed to go home for two months every summer, but a lot of parents could not afford to bring the children home, and the children had to stay in schools all year round.

Generally, the residential school has been regarded as the institution that caused the devastation of First Nations cultures. With the residential school, First Nations children were removed from their families and placed in a foreign environment where they were forbidden to use their mother tongue and maintain their culture (Furniss, 1992; Haig-Brown, 1988). Using one's mother tongue was a subject of strict punishment that some Nisga'a people experienced.

With the provincial school, Nisga'a students were still removed from their parents and had to stay in the boarding homes that were non-First Nations. They had to face daily and direct discrimination from teachers and other students. Many Euro-Canadians had a distorted image of the Nisga'a.[13]

The colonial education that Nisga'a students received brought many negative effects to the Nisga'a culture and the social system. One example is the mental block that people have when they try to speak the Nisga'a language.[14] For some, it took many years before they started feeling comfortable speaking the language.[15] Furthermore, with both the residential school and the provincial school, "young people were forced to be away from the natural parents for the whole school year. And therefore, they lost out the valuable parental counseling and directions in life."[16] The lack of parental counseling caused not only Nisga'a students to fail in school, but also a lack of parenting skills. A lot of parents had to learn how to be parents when they became parents.

5. ISSUES OF EDUCATION: TODAY'S REALITY

5.1 School District No. 92 (Nisga'a)

After having experienced decades of colonial education system by the Canadian government, the Nisga'a joined the British Columbia provincial school district system, and established

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[11] The current author avoids an anthropological explanation here. However, it can be simply described as gift distribution done by a clan that is responsible for an feast.

[12] According to Lorene Plante (interview, October 30, 1995), children had to go to school until they were fifteen years old.

[13] According to Kathleen Clayton (interview, November 28, 1995), many people thought that the Nisga'a were living in the teepee, which was not Nisga'a traditional dwelling at all. The teepee was used by many First Nations in the great plain, which is often seen in the Western films.

[14] Interview with Lorene Plante, October 30, 1995

[15] Interview with Shirley Morven, October 25, 1995

[16] Interview with Alvin McKay, November 10, 1995

their own School District No. 92 (Nisga'a) in the Nass Valley, their traditional territory. Today, all the four villages in the valley each have one elementary school, and there is one secondary school located in one village. One of the main goals of the school district has been "Nisga'a-emphasized bilingual and bicultural curriculum in parallel with the provincial core curriculum" (McKay & McKay, 1987, p. 74).

The establishment of the school district might be perceived as emancipation from the problem. However, there were issues that the school district had to face. One of them was the high dropout rate. In 1975, "[t]here was a dropout rate of 90 per cent in the secondary years" (McKay & McKay, 1987, p. 77). The graduation rate constantly increased from 29.9 per cent in the 1987/88 school year to 55.6 per cent in the 1991/92 school year,[17] but compared to the provincial graduation rate, it has not been so high.

5.2 The Folk Model and the Reality

In spite of the problem described above, the establishment of School District No. 92 (Nisga'a) surely brought positive effects on Nisga'a children's human development. One interviewee stated, "You are here getting formal education, and then other things [are] going on; funerals, weddings, stone movings, pole raisings, education as Nisga'a".[18] However, this very dichotomization of formal school education and other types of learning itself indicates a rather detached nature of school education from the holistic teaching and learning process.

In order to analyze the detached situation of the school, it is important to look into what are taught in the school. The British Columbia School Act allows school district in the province to develop local curricula. The Nisga'a have provided Nisga'a students in the Nass Valley with the Nisga'a language and culture courses even prior to the inception of the school district. The ratio of the locally developed curriculum is, however, only two out of ten electives. The other eight are provincially prescribed, and less relevant for the Nisga'a.

The following statements of Nisga'a indicate that the Nisga'a knowledge is not reflected in the discipline taught at the school. Deanna Nyce stated:

> Science is a good area to look at, because science exists in the Nisga'a world. When you get a fish and prepare your fish, there is science. There is physics involved in raising a totem pole. There is economics involved in the feast system. But [the provincial curriculum] shuts out so many [Nisga'a] students, because the students cannot relate that curriculum to their everyday experience.[20]

Kathleen Clayton mentioned another discipline:

> We have a big land. Do our kids really know anything about it? A part of our land, exactly where we are at, the different areas, mountains, what they call it in Nisga'a? We learned about Italy, France, all that. It doesn't even apply to us. Some of us will never even get there.[21]

When Nisga'a students cannot relate what are taught in the school with their immediate experience, it is difficult for them to find values in school education. For many Nisga'a, what

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[17] School District Annual Reports 1991-1992 and 1992-1993

[18] Interview with Ben Haizimsque, November 8, 1995

[20] Interview, November 2, 1995.

[21] Interview, November 28, 1995

they are seeking in school education is the total integration of the school and the Nisga'a culture. The following statements are from several interviewees:

> There are lot of people, they can do that kind of [cultural] instruction, and it needs to be recognized in the public school system.[22]

> We need to be able to have Nisga'aized science curriculum, we need to be able to have Nisga'aized math curriculum, [to] make it meaningful for Nisga'a students, not only in kindergarten, but at grade 12 and beyond.[23]

> My ideal would be to see Nisga'a language and Nisga'a culture incorporated into all the classes, so that the teachers would be able to present some aspect of their classroom teaching through Nisga'a language, and including some aspects of Nisga'a culture.[24]

In relation to the incorporation of the cultural content into the curriculum, MacIvor (1995) states that "educators should guard against inadvertently telling students that only the perspectives affirmed by conventional science are valuable", and that "traditional perspectives stand on their own without verification from conventional science" (p. 87).

6. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to depict what the Nisga'a mean by saying that education is "a total way of life", how the school education in the past destroyed the whole process of teaching and learning for human development, and what school education is in the present time in the nation. The Nisga'a do not deny the school education itself, as they know that it is impossible for the Nisga'a Nation to be isolated from the rest of the world, and that it is important to be competent enough to contact the outside the nation. On the other hand, what are taught in the school are not relevant enough to their cultural knowledge.

The reality of education today is not the same as what the Nisga'a folk model depicted. However, this does not mean that the Nisga'a give a model for reality, which is normative statements about how things should be. Instead, the Nisga'a folk model should be understood as something like blueprints that are in people's mind.

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[22] Interview with Jacob McKay, December 12, 1995

[23] Interview with Deanna Nyce, November 2, 1995

[24] Interview with David Griffin, November 17, 1995

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